# Defining a transit vision for Atlanta

By John H. Eaves/For the Journal-Constitution/October 20, 2008

Pick a city that has excellent transit services —- not just in the urban center —- but for the region as a whole. Think about Boston, Washington, or perhaps San Francisco. Then imagine designing a vision to bring our own region up to par with those great cities.

Start with the transit assets we currently have in this region, namely MARTA, Xpress and the county transit systems.

Next, extend that vision outward and provide bus service to the counties without a local bus service. After that, extend MARTA rail and construct a series of commuter rail lines where they make sense.

Lastly, put in state-of-the-art transit technologies like light rail, bus rapid transit, and modern streetcars to unclog the bottlenecks and get the system moving.

Now what do you have? You've imagined a regional transportation system that would address the often-heard complaint that "transit doesn't go where I want to go, and doesn't get me there fast enough."

I joined a bi-partisan group of 12 locally elected officials and other representatives in conducting this very exercise on behalf of our region. This group, known as the Transit Planning Board, came together in 2006.

For the last two years, the TPB has remained focused on one central goal: to develop the vision that will take transit in our region to the next level. At our August meeting, we adopted a plan to guide transit investments in this region. Since that time, many of the agencies and local governments that have been a part of TPB have passed resolutions in support of this vision.

Thanks to this rare moment of regional consensus, we now have a vision for the future of transit. This plan, known officially as "Concept 3," is comprehensive, bold, and ambitious. Imagine increasing the percentage of workday trips taken by transit at the five largest activity centers in our region from 15 percent, as is the case today, to 21 percent, or, with appropriate shifts in land use, to 39 percent by 2030. These changes are achievable, and the benefits of these transit investments outweigh the costs by a five-to-one margin.

Before our August vote, TPB shared our vision of regional transit with the public. What we found was that the public sees the value of increasing metro Atlanta's investment in public transportation. Voters in each of the 11 counties were supportive of funding strategies, such as a transportation sales tax. The chief complaint we heard was urgency —- people wanted to see the transit investments detailed in our plan realized sooner. These results rang true not just for Fulton, but for each of the other 10 counties.

The public feedback we received makes it clear that the people of Fulton, much the same as people in the rest of the region, want to live in a region with excellent —- even "world-class" —- transit service.

Atlanta can and should be a world-class city with world-class transit throughout our region. I have seen the future. With the help of forward-thinking residents, policymakers and lawmakers, it can be accomplished.

> John Eaves is chairman of the Fulton County Commission a board member of the Transit Planning

# O.C. toll road agency seeks federal bailout

By Susannah Rosenblatt, Los Angeles Times/ October 17, 2008

TCA has requested a $1.1-billion federal loan to help merge its two arms and to help refinance its $4.6 million debt. Critics say the roads aren't as profitable as TCA claims.
As the federal government undertakes the largest financial bailout in history, Orange County's toll road agency is asking for its own hefty government handout.

The agency is seeking a $1.1-billion loan of taxpayer money to shore up the finances of its network of turnpikes. The reason? As gas prices gyrate and the economy flounders, drivers -- and the revenue they bring -- have been deserting the toll roads.

**FOR THE RECORD:**
Toll agency loan: A headline on an article in Friday's California section about the effort by Orange County's Transportation Corridor Agencies to acquire a $1.1-billion government loan said the agency is requesting a federal bailout. The word "bailout" should not have been used. The agency is requesting a federal loan, to be repaid with future toll road revenue, to help refinance the agency's existing debt. —

The Transportation Corridor Agencies is seeking to merge its two distinct arms -- separate agencies that oversee different roads but share a single staff. The government loan, the largest of its kind, would help refinance the agencies' $4.6 billion in existing debt.
Critics condemn the effort, saying that the agency is reneging on a promise to never use public money for its highways. They also contend that the loan would divert scarce federal funds away from new transportation projects nationwide.

If the loan and merger go through, the renamed Transportation Corridor System would be more efficient and have stronger finances to better improve the 51-mile network of roads, said agency spokeswoman Lisa Telles.

The request for $1.1 billion from the federal government was not a reversal of earlier pledges to avoid taxpayer financing, she said, because the loan would be repaid with future toll road revenue.

"Certainly in the past we have not utilized tax dollars for the majority of the project," Telles said, adding that the loan would lower the agency's interest rate on the refinanced debt by at least a couple of percentage points. The restructuring would also include the issuance of new toll revenue bonds.

According to the agency's website,, current bonds "can only be repaid by future tolls and development fees, taxpayers are not responsible for repaying the debt if future toll revenues fall short."

But foes of a proposed toll road extension through south Orange County labeled the move a "total reversal" of the agency's assurance that toll revenues and development fees would cover the cost of the roads. And they voiced concern that dwindling use of the roads could leave taxpayers footing the bill.

"It's becoming increasingly clear the toll roads are not performing as promised," said Bill White, an attorney who works with the Save San Onofre Coalition, an array of conservation groups fighting the proposed 16-mile extension of the 241 toll road through a state park in north San Diego County. "Things have gone from very bad to much worse."

Use of the 73 toll road last fiscal year was roughly half of what was predicted, and those numbers have dropped further this year. Several years ago the road's bond ratings were downgraded to junk status. The 241, 261 and 133 toll roads have generally fared better, but recent usage has also been slipping.

"Even if there was an economic recovery and even if the toll roads were doing just fine, this would be an unjustifiable use of taxpayer money," White said.

Responding to questions about the system's financial viability, Telles said the agency has "always been able to make our debt service payments, we've always been able to pay our expenses," and is not in danger of defaulting on current bonds. Though she acknowledged the current economic woes have reduced traffic nationwide, she anticipates a long-term recovery in toll road use.

The agency is applying for the money through the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act administered by the U.S. Department of Transportation. The act, which is largely designed to help fund transportation projects of national and regional importance, distributes an average of more than $2 billion in credit help each year.

The largest loan to date was $917 million for the Central Texas Turnpike.

Other loans have included $140 million to build a San Diego toll road and $600 million to update aging equipment of the Washington, D.C., mass transit system.

Because infrastructure companies are likely to be hit particularly hard by the credit crunch, appealing to the federal government for funds makes sense, said Lisa Schweitzer, an assistant professor in the School of Policy, Planning and Development at USC.

The risk, Schweitzer said, is whether those toll road revenues will eventually pan out: "It's actually not that easy to make money on roads."

## MARTA expansion gets green light

Cathy Johnson DeKalb Neighbor Newspaper 10-16-08

Taking steps to make way for future growth, a surge in the use of public transportation and better connectivity, the Atlanta City Council last week approved a key amendment to the 1971 Rapid Transit Contract and Assistance Agreement between MARTA, the city, and Fulton and DeKalb counties.

According to the latest MARTA figures, August ridership was up almost 12 percent over August 2007, across all modes of transportation.

The 13th amendment, approved 15-0 at the Oct. 6 City Council meeting, will coordinate MARTA with the Beltline, Connect Atlanta and other transit initiatives and put the city in line for federal funding.

“The 13th amendment aligns MARTA planning efforts with the regional vision outlined in Transit Planning Board Concept 3,” said MARTA General Manager and CEO Beverly Scott. “It positions the city of Atlanta and MARTA for federal reauthorization and makes our transit eligible for new legislation.”

The Fulton and DeKalb county commissions also must approve support for the 13th amendment, so that projects can move forward, according to MARTA.

“This is not a request for funding but a request for additional projects,” said District 8 City Councilwoman Clair Muller and chair of the Transportation Committee. “The amendment passed easily, unlike the 12th amendment, which called for an increase in taxes.”

The 12th amendment to the Rapid Transit Contract and Assistance Agreement extended a 1 percent MARTA tax in 2007.

Several projects are included in the 13th amendment request for the city of Atlanta.

It allows for plans to integrate the Beltline with the Peachtree Street Corridor and adds high capacity transit from Arts Center Station to boundaries on Interstate 75 toward the northwest.

In Fulton County, one important project will be a high-capacity rail line along the Ga. 400 northern corridor from I-285 to Windward Parkway, among other projects in Fulton and DeKalb counties.

The amendment serves as a critical step in advancing transit projects at the federal level.

“While we live in uncertain financial times, every year some federal funds have to come back to the states and to local planning boards,” said Ms. Muller. “The amendment is a necessary move to get in line for critical federal funding.”

It’s also necessary to provide for more and more people moving to Atlanta and expecting good public transportation.

“We must think about future growth of our commercial corridors and neighborhoods. We want to encourage public transit wherever it’s available,” said Ms. Muller.

## APTA Conference: Clean Tech Blog 10-13-08

**Keeping America Moving <**http://www.cleantechblog.com/2008/10/keeping-america-moving.html>

By John Addison (10/11/08). A record number of Americans are saving thousands per year by using public transportation from one day per week to living car free. In 2007, a 50-year record of 10.3 billion trips per year, saving over 4 billion gallons of car gasoline use. 2008 will set a new record that may approach 11 billion trips as more commuters leave their cars parked to brave standing-room-only train and bus rides.

Fifteen thousand who run global transportation systems convened in San Diego from October 6 to 8 to examine a range of strategic issues and to review 800 exhibitors at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA <http://apta.com/> ) Expo.

As transportation managers accommodate record numbers of passengers, they face challenges. Most transportation funding is spent on highways, not on public transportation. Fare revenue is only a fraction of budgets. Loss of property and sales tax funding is forcing operators to cut budgets. Diesel fuel prices have increased 166 percent in four years.

Buses designed to stay on the road for 12 years are being kept in operation longer. When new buses are ordered, reduced fuel cost is a priority. 63 percent of buses ordered in 2007 were alt-powered using hybrid technology, natural gas as a fuel, or both. City light-rail is typically powered by electricity. Public transportation is increasingly using renewable energy (RE) by installing more solar power and contracting for RE with public utilities.

The shift to fewer car miles on highways and alt-powered transportation is helping the nation need less oil. U.S. use of oil refined products in transportation is estimated to be reduced 5 percent this year. Should rail and public transit resolve their budget crises, oil use will drop further.

Member organizations were encouraged to overcome all obstacles in accommodating record riders by Dr. Beverly Scott, APTA's new Chair and also CEO of MARTA in Atlanta. When federal funding of public transportation expires in 2009, APTA will ask the new Congress for a $123 billion 6-year funding package.

Pushed to the wall, several major transit systems are making politically unpopular fare increases. Some are cutting routes, frequencies, and making layoffs.

In his speech, Jim Simpson, Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) Administrator encouraged executives to consider public-private partnerships (PPP). At the Expo, I visited with Veolia <http://www.veolia-transport.com/en/> (NYSE: VE), the world leader in transportation service contracts and management. Veolia has 120 contracts to run transportation in 30 countries for annual revenues of about $8 billion.

A good example of an effective PPP since 1993 is Veolia's partnership with the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) of Southern Nevada. I have personally been impressed in using their bus rapid transit while attending Las Vegas conferences. During the life of this partnership, ridership has increased from 15 to 60 million per year. At the APTA Expo, on of Las Vegas' new 62-foot rapid transit vehicles was on display, looking more like a bullet train than a bus. The vehicles are designed by Wright with ISE doing the hybrid-electric drive systems using Siemens components. Fifty of the new vehicles will be delivered to Las Vegas.

For transportation operators that cannot make capital expenditures, PPP can provide a way for private corporations to buy needed equipment, then utilize the rail and buses as part of service contracts. Unfortunately, the expansion of public-private partnerships (PPP) envisioned by the FTA goes in the face of some of its obsolete legislated rules for funding.

In the long-term public transportation will serve a growing number of Americans because of increasing oil prices, plus increased preference for urban living by the young, by families, and by retiring boomers. As transit stops being a neglected child compared to highway funding, it will meet the financial challenge of expanding routes and increasing frequency by adding rail, adding buses and employing more drivers and maintenance professionals. Significant growth will reduce or oil dependency, make people more productive, and unclog the streets and freeways. Even those who never use transit will benefit from lower gasoline prices, less time in gridlock and breathing cleaner air.

Significant growth will be supported by high speed rail linking suburbs and linking transportation systems. Jim Simpson, (FTA) Administrator, regularly takes the 3 hour Amtrak Acela regularly from New York to Washington, D.C. Often he cannot get a seat as record demand soars ahead of investment in more rolling stock. Amtrak carried a record 28.7 million people in fiscal year 2008. The company has posted six years of ridership and revenue growth, recently benefiting from high gas and airline prices. The number of trips over the past year increased 11% and revenue 14%.

On November 4, voters in 33 states will be making decisions about approving transportation funding. In California, voting on Proposition 1A will decide if the nation has a second high-speed rail system that could cover 800 miles and carry forecasted ranges of 32 to 68 million annual rides by 2020. It will cost far less than the alternative of expanding highways and airports. Should voters give the system the green light, the $10 billion of California taxpayer funded bond will need to be matched with $10 billion federal and $10 billion of public-private partnership money. The system will be electric, using no petroleum.

A study by the American Automobile Association (AAA) shows that the average cost of owning and operating a passenger vehicle is 54.1 cents per mile. The IRS allows you to deduct 58.5 cents per mile for business. This is over $8,000 per year per vehicle, based on 15,000 miles of driving. Depreciation is part of that cost. Anyone who has bought a car for $20,000 and later sold it for $5,000 understands depreciation. Fuel, maintenance, tolls, parking, insurance, and tickets add up. Most households have two vehicles, costing them over $16,000 per year.

More Americans will save thousands by using public transportation. For some it will be one day per week, for others it will be the primary way that they travel. City and regional systems are offering trip-planners, dynamic maps, and realtime GPS information to those using the Internet, text messaging, and smart phone technology. I have frequently used Google Transit to plan trips that have several transit legs. Enjoy the savings of time and money from public transportation.

John Addison publishes the Clean Fleet Report <http://cleanfleetreport.com/index.htm> with over 100 articles and reports about vehicles and transportation. Disclosure: the author is a modest long-term stockholder in Veolia. All his stock holdings are getting more modest every day. John now uses transit more frequently than his car.

# Lack of funding, act hurt MARTA

By Luz Borrero/ AJC 10-13-08

Headlines about our region's traffic congestion are bad news for the people who live, work, learn and play here. It is also bad news for any effort to promote economic development in Atlanta. MARTA is the backbone of our region's transit system, helping connect people to job and activity centers, increasing mobility, adding to the quality of life and boosting economic growth.

A recent comprehensive effort to develop a vision for transit for our region by the Transit Planning Board predicts that the entire regional transit system will need approximately $54 billion to pay for current and future transit expansion needs through 2030. This amounts to approximately $2.4 billion per year for the next 22 years. If we want to preserve our region's ability to attract top companies such as Wipro Technologies and the American Cancer Society and major events such as the 1996 Olympic Games, then all of us, as residents of Georgia, need to pay attention to transit, and especially MARTA and how it serves our community.

Under the leadership of Dr. Beverly Scott, MARTA is entering a new era. Today, MARTA's expertise extends beyond heavy rail: its new team brings tremendous professional experience in developing and managing multimodal transit systems, including light rail. New initiatives such as the Beltline and the Peachtree streetcar are ideal opportunities to enhance MARTA service and improve its connectivity. Unfortunately, because of restrictive state legislation enacted long ago, MARTA's leadership team is handcuffed for three reasons.

First, it was originally envisioned that the system would serve the larger metro Atlanta area, then only five counties. Many people are surprised to learn that today, residents and visitors in only three jurisdictions, Fulton and DeKalb counties and Atlanta, contribute to MARTA via a self-imposed one-cent sales tax. Over the last 35 years more than $6.2 billion has been collected for MARTA through this tax. However, since the metro region has seen explosive growth, MARTA needs support from all of the jurisdictions it serves in order to keep pace.

Second, MARTA is the only transit system of its kind in the country that does not receive significant financial support from its state. Its revenue structure is out of sync with how other major North American metro transit systems are funded. Since both the region and state benefit from the services provided by MARTA, Georgia needs to buy in.

Lastly, it's not just a lack of funding that has hindered MARTA's development. The 1965 MARTA Act has long crippled the system through stringent limitations on how sales tax revenue can be used. MARTA is required to use 50 percent of these funds on capital projects and 50 percent on operations. How can MARTA efficiently expand and improve services to better serve the region without greater control of its revenue? MARTA's new leadership is prepared and welcomes the opportunity to be accountable for the management of these resources. Greater flexibility and a larger percentage of tax revenue allocated for operational expenses are needed to help the system meet increasing demand.

MARTA will be re-introducing legislation to the 2009 General Assembly that would enable greater flexibility in the use of its existing tax revenue so that more money will be available for operational expenses to enhance services. It's our hope that legislators will support this bill. It won't solve everything, but it's a start.

- Ø Luz Borrero is deputy chief operating officer for the City of Atlanta.

## Sunday editorial: Yes to Proposition M

Editorial Board/St Louis Today.com/10/05/08

St. Louis County voters will be asked Nov. 4 to approve a half-cent sales tax increase to provide funds for public transportation — sustaining the current Metro transit system and providing for future expansion of MetroLink light rail.

A sleeper issue, Proposition M has been caught up in a debate about failed lawsuits and allegations about improper financial management at Metro. In fact, it is an economic development issue. If you think the sale of Anheuser-Busch or the closing of the Chrysler plant was a problem for St. Louis, wait'll you see what happens if Prop M fails.

Simply put, the outcome of the sales tax vote will influence whether St. Louis remains competitive among metropolitan regions that are trying to attract top talent, top jobs and other economic opportunities.

Dynamic public transportation — systems that are smart, efficient and convenient — is a key indicator of a community's confidence and vibrancy. Our region has made major strides toward creating such a system with its $1.4 billion investment (bus and rail) over the past decade. But many voters still need to know what's in it for them.

Only 8 percent of county residents tell pollsters they regularly ride the Metro system. Forty-five percent say they use the system for special events. The rest never get on a bus or train. Why should they pay a nickel more in taxes for every $10 they spend?

The answer: Because the people of our community who do use and depend on the transit system are an essential cog in the local economy on which all of us depend. They're the men and women who keep our hospitals and nursing homes operating; the people who cook the food, serve the meals, bus the tables and wash the dishes in the restaurants we patronize; the people who help find us shoes and cell phones and hammers and baby clothes in thousands of retail stories, and countless other businesses large and small.

Without public transit, many couldn't get to work. Without public transit, the worlds of many elderly or disabled transit riders would shrink. Ask not for whom the buses and trains run; one way or another, in an era of $4-a-gallon gasoline, global climate change and economic hard times, they run for all of us.
Proposition M's defeat would force Metro to make deep cuts in service early next year. Trains and buses would run less frequently and serve fewer areas. Plans to expand MetroLink would be put on hold indefinitely.

A scaled-back system would mean less federal operating support. The inability to raise local matching funds would mean missed opportunities for capital subsidies. And given the very long planning and budgeting process that transportation systems require, we would be living with the consequences of those missed opportunities for years to come.

Metro faces a $45 million shortfall in its operating budget, and, yes, some of the problem is of its own making: poor planning on the Cross County MetroLink extension, flawed judgment and poor oversight of its failed lawsuit against the Cross County's construction managers. Larry Salci, the agency's former president, ran roughshod over a sleepy board of commissioners.

But most of the shortfall was beyond the agency's control, a toxic combination of cutbacks in state, federal and county support and new accounting rules. Metro's strong new management needs an alert, involved and astute board of commissioners and active support from the politicians on both sides of the river who appoint them.

Prop M would raise an estimated $80 million a year. Half would be used for ongoing operations, with the remainder banked for future MetroLink expansion. Approval in St. Louis County also would trigger a similar sales tax in the city that voters approved in 1997.

Too often public transit is misperceived as a social service for the poor; it is, in fact, a crucial tool for economic development. To change that skewed public perspective, the members of our region's business and civic community need to realize that writing a check, while necessary, is not enough. This is a time for leadership, not merely lip service.

# New plan promising for transit funding

THE DES MOINES REGISTER'S EDITORIAL • OCTOBER 6, 2008

If the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority grows into a fully regional mass-transit service, a fair share of credit must go to a group of city officials from the suburbs. Their effort to break a logjam over finances in recent weeks may save the transit authority from falling apart.

Last week, the DART Commission agreed to seek comments from the 20 member communities on a proposal for a new formula for setting tax rates for its services. The proposed assessment formula is the product of several months' worth of negotiations by elected officials and the commission. The outcome will determine whether the transit authority will have the resources to provide increasing levels of public transportation to the entire metropolitan area.

Suburban communities may question some details of this proposal, but they should buy the concept.

DART was created in 2005 with the help of state legislation that enabled cities to band together to share bus services paid for with a special property-tax levy. Nineteen Polk County cities agreed to join Des Moines to create the regional authority. That means property owners in those communities are assessed to pay for the service.

Everyone likes the concept of regional transit, especially after gas prices started shooting up and freeways have become increasingly clogged. The challenge is figuring out how to fairly and equitably assess that cost in each community.

New assessments were proposed last spring that would have raised the levy substantially in several suburbs. Leaders in those communities blew a gasket. Waukee withdrew completely, and other cities have threatened to follow suit if the levies are not more in line with the level of transit service each receives.

This potential revolt threatens the future of DART, and the dispute behind it cuts to the heart of the philosophy behind a regional transit authority: Everyone in the region shares equally in the cost, regardless of their level of service. Under that philosophy, DART will have more resources to expand hours of bus service and extend routes farther into the reaches of the metropolitan area.

The odds of such a revolt were reduced last week, thanks to a new formula proposed by a group of city managers. The proposal would make a transition from the current formula, which has Des Moines paying 70 percent of the costs, by making an incremental shift to the other communities. The basic principles of this plan have been worked out by countless hours of discussions by DART commissioners and staff. But city managers Bob Layton of Urbandale, Jeff Pomeranz of West Des Moines and Rick Clark of Des Moines deserve credit for taking the lead.

The proposed formula requires a spreadsheet to explain it in detail, but it is founded on three principles: First, there's a foundation assessment based on the historical level of the member cities' support, which would not change. Second, there's an add-on rate, which would rise as service and expenses grow in future years. Third, the rate paid by suburban property owners would grow over time to repay Des Moines for its disproportional investment in the bus service over the years.

This proposal is a reasonable approach to a difficult challenge. In the end, if it keeps all 20 communities together, the Des Moines metropolitan area could have the sort of regional bus system that is essential if it hopes to avoid building ever more roads and parking facilities.

The announcement that the Trinity Railway Express (TRE) will increase service on its popular Fort Worth-to-Dallas line was most welcome news. It is an indication that more and more people are ready and willing to use public transportation.

Part of the increase in demand can be credited to gasoline prices, that spiked this summer, but even after gas prices subsided a bit, public transit remained the choice of many area residents who apparently found it expedient and cost-effective.

Last month, ridership on the TRE was 15.9 percent higher than it was the same time last year, according to officials at the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, known as the T. Ridership was up 22.1 percent in June, 12.5 percent in May and 18.4 in April.

Those are all very impressive numbers regardless of the reasons for the increases.

Overall ridership for the T was up 15.9 percent in July, with a 12.3 increase for buses, a 34.7 percent increase for van pools and a 20.2 increase for mobility impaired service.

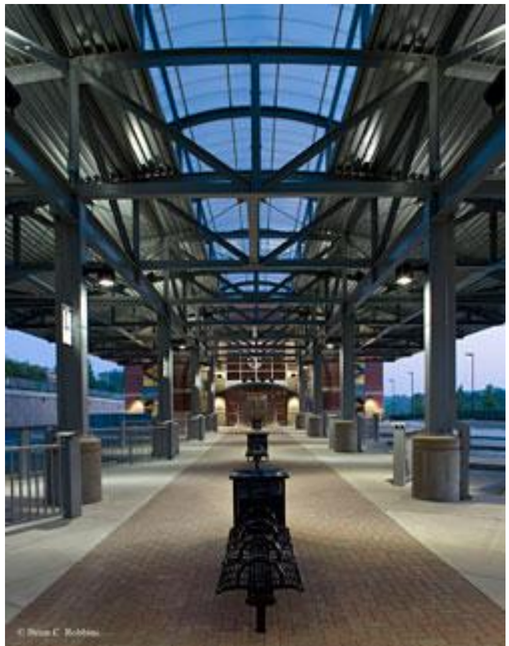
Also encouraging are the ridership figures for the newly instituted weekday bus service between Arlington and Fort Worth.

After only four weeks, ridership on that route is at 492, "already at one-third of the projected weekly ridership of 1,500," a spokesperson said.

Convenient, fast and affordable public transportation — with rail service as a major component — has to be a part of this region’s future for several reasons, including reducing traffic congestion, conserving energy and insuring better air quality.

If we build it, they will ride.

## Athens Multi-Modal Transportation Center Wins ULI Atlanta "Development of Excellence" Award




INFORMATION

The Urban Land Institute (ULI) of Atlanta recently recognized the Athens Multi-Modal Transportation Center with one of its most prestigious honors — the "Development of Excellence" award. Atlanta-based architecture firm Niles Bolton Associates worked with the Unified Government of Athens-Clarke County, Ga., to provide programming, architecture and interior design services for this new transportation hub in Athens, Ga.

One of five projects honored by the Atlanta District Council of ULI at the annual awards dinner on Sept. 18, the 9,500-square-foot transit center links Athens Transit and University of Georgia buses, bicycle, taxi and pedestrian facilities into a single hub. The facility also serves as a community bridge, linking downtown Athens with the Oconee River Greenway.

"We are honored to receive such a prestigious award," said Lester Love, lead architect on the project and a partner at Niles Bolton Associates. "One of the goals was that the multi-modal station would be a catalyst for future development. It has really caught on, and I think it has really unlocked the development potential for that block of land between downtown and the Oconee River that previously was under-utilized."

The $9 million center was citizen funded through a sales tax, and is comprised of glass, brick, wood and cast stone, with exposed recycled steel to capture the industrial look of the region and the warehouse district east of downtown Athens. "The new Athens Multi-Modal Transportation Center is a vast improvement from the two curb-side shelters and information booth, located on two sides of a city block in downtown that served as our transfer center for over twenty years," said Athens Transit Director Butch McDuffie. The transportation center features a bus transfer facility including 17 covered bus bays and climate controlled waiting areas, restrooms, passenger drop of area, ticket/information booth, bicycle storage and has provisions for a future commuter rail.

ULI Atlanta's Development of Excellence awards were judged based on the following criteria: land use, sustainability, creativity in organization/management, smart growth, innovation in design and architecture, filling a community need, overcoming obstacles in development, and the use of public/private partnerships. Niles Bolton Associates earned a second ULI Development of Excellence award for their design work on The Howard School in Atlanta.

# Regional Transit Panel Frets Over Sales Tax Increase Idea

By Christian M. Wade/Tampa Tribune/September 27, 2008

**TAMPA** - The future of a regional transit system in West Central Florida could depend on the answer to this question: What comes first, the plan or the funding?

Members of the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority are working on what's sure to be an expensive plan to knit the region together with transit. One of the most likely sources of funding is a half-penny sales tax increase in each of the seven counties.

Getting that kind of dedicated local funding would help pave the way for federal funding but also would require state legislative action and approval from the region's voters.

That could be a hard sell, members agreed at a Friday meeting.

"We can't take this to the voters right now," said board member Norma Patterson, a Sarasota County commissioner.

"People are having trouble paying their mortgages."

"I'm having heart palpitations about a sales tax increase in Manatee," said Donna Hayes, a Manatee County commissioner and TBARTA board member.

"It's just not going to fly."

Mayor Pam Iorio, who wants to put the sales tax issue before Hillsborough County voters in 2010, said getting funding will require having a workable plan to show voters.

She favors a plan that calls for trains from New Tampa to Tampa International Airport with stops at the University of South Florida and downtown, and from the airport to Linebaugh Avenue.

"They'll vote for it if they see a plan," the mayor said. "Right now, all we have is $2 million in dubious funding."

TBARTA was created by the state Legislature and relies on the Tampa Bay Partnership, a public-private consortium, for much of its current financing.

This year, legislators gave the authority a one-time infusion of $2 million that board members hope to use to entice a director and hire an attorney.

Legislators gave TBARTA the power to borrow money, levy tolls and condemn land, but no ability to levy taxes to raise money for its operations.

By statute, the agency must have a plan in place by July 2009, but it's working to finish it by the end of this year.

Further complicating voter approval of a dedicated sales tax for transit is that only three counties in the state-chartered group - Hillsborough, Pinellas and Sarasota - have the authority to even put a tax increase question on the ballot.

In other business, the board agreed to move forward with interviews for candidates for the group's first executive director, who will be paid $150,000 a year with benefits.

A big part of the director's job will be convincing voters to support to plan.

"We need someone to get out there and sell this to the public," Patterson said.

## Time to get going on public transit

Editorial/Montgomery Advertiser/October 6, 2008

Pundits writing about transportation issues often cite "the American love affair with the automobile." That's a factor in our energy and transportation situations, to be sure, but in much of Alabama, that love affair is really more of a shotgun marriage.

For most of us, there is no real alternative to the automobile. Public transportation is minimal at best and often nonexistent.

If we're looking for government investment to spur the development of public transportation, we can't look to state government. Revenue from Alabama's fuel taxes is restricted by law to use only for the construction and maintenance of roads and bridges. Not a cent of that money may be used for public transportation.

That's a seriously shortsighted approach that takes an increasingly heavy toll on Alabamians.

For decades, statistics have shown that Alabamians drive more miles than the residents of all but a handful of other states. One reason is that many of us drive considerable distances to get to our jobs. We tend to live in the suburbs or in rural areas and drive to urban areas to work.

It is significant, then, that preliminary figures from the U.S. Department of Transportation show that Alabamians drove 286 million fewer miles through July of this year than during the same period a year ago. Clearly, we're cutting back, largely in response to fuel prices that, even though they are drifting back down toward the $3.50 range from the $4-a-gallon range, remain painfully high.

But our ability to cut back is limited, as few of us have any other transportation options beyond personal vehicles.

Suppose, however, that things were different, that there were broader access to buses and trains, to the kind of public transportation that moves larger numbers of people at lower cost. There's a market for it; the DOT reports an 11 percent increase in mass transit use nationwide in July.

The days of cheap gasoline are over, and that makes the individual vehicle an increasingly expensive choice -- fiscally and environmentally -- for routine travel. It's time -- indeed, past time -- for Alabama to look seriously at realistic public transportation options.